

Video Relay Service is a milestone in the the history of the deaf community. Finally, we have a means by which we can communicate in our own language for our telecommunication needs just like the hearing citizens of our country have been able for decades to communicate in theirs. While we are grateful for the role that the TTY relay has played over the years, it is my firm and unwavering belief that for ASL users, the time of the TTY will pass. With the advent of technology to support VRS, it is time for the government to acknowledge and support wholeheartedly and unwaveringly the use of VRS for its deaf citizens. This will be yet another tool to empower them in their work and personal lives. I myself use VRS regularly in my work. Naturally, you, who have had full telecommunications access all your lives, may not appreciate the freedom that communicating in your own language can bring. But there is a definable difference between TRS and VRS. Typing a message on TTY brings with it all the necessary delays and GA's and SK's and other customary abbreviations we use to streamline the process. But VRS gives me the freedom to have a natural conversation just like you have on the phone. I feel like I am talking as an equal. I can see your voice inflections. I can see your emotional nuances. I can see your laughter and I can see your tears. All of these are expressively communicated through the Video Interpreter. It breathes new life into a phone conversation. Would you be happy when your phone company tells you that you can only make phone calls during the day, and that you will have to wait between 45 secs to 2 hours to connect to your party? If that is not satisfactory communication for you, then why are you imposing such communication practices on us?

My understanding of federal law says we are to have equal access. Until now, TTY was the best we could do. Now VRS is available. The time is NOW to provide us with the unfettered access we have been promised all along. Stop the political maneuvering and nonsense, and fulfill the office to which you have been appointed and meet the needs of the people you are here to serve. That is why government exists ... not to play games with each other to grab power over one party or the other, but serve the people whom you have sworn to serve. You see, democracy succeeds when we work together as a people to meet one another's needs. Democracy fails when we focus on the accumulation of power and use that power for our own needs rather than to meet the needs of those we are called to serve. The time is NOW to serve the deaf community. Do not go down in the history books as a commission who held us back. Go down in the history books as the commission who empowered the deaf community by giving them yet another tool to enable them in their role as productive American citizens and the peers of the hearing. You will not regret this investment in the deaf community.